

A LEGACY OF INK: LUI SHOU-KWAN 40 YEARS ON

In September, Hong Kong gallery Alisan Fine Arts kicked off its fall program with “A Legacy of Ink: Lui Shou-kwan 40 Years On.” Held at the Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC), the exhibition commemorated both the art and the memory of one of Hong Kong’s preeminent mid-20th century artists on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of his passing. The show examined Lui’s impact through 26 of his paintings, as well as works by 12 of his former students who themselves are now noted artists. In addition, to further explore Lui’s legacy, a special section was devoted to works by local, emerging artists, including graduates from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where Lui once taught.

The exhibition was spread across the HKAC’s Pao Galleries in three segments, with the first part presenting a cross-section of Lui’s oeuvre from the late 1950s onward—his mature period. Upon entering the gallery, visitors were greeted with *Meditation* (1974), a nearly three-meter-wide ink-on-paper work. Representative of the artist’s abstract style, which resulted from his lifelong exploration of Chinese ink traditions, Daoism, Zen Buddhism and Western abstract expressionism, *Meditation* features dark, sweeping strokes of vigorously applied ink, with a red flame-like gesture depicted above them.

In the next room were examples from Lui’s iconic “Zen” series, as well as some of his landscape paintings. These works included *Zen* (1970), a visual essay on Lui’s personal path toward enlightenment. Dark, fluid ink washes cover the nearly three-meter-tall vertical composition, while glimmers of red appear through their gaps. Attention is drawn toward a seeming ray of light that is beaming upward and out from a cloud of darkness. Another work in this room was *Hong Kong at Night* (1961), an impressionistic landscape portraying buildings by the harbor, in muted other tones, which peek from underneath soft, layered washes of black ink. Lui’s range of distinct styles demonstrates his versatility and desire to experiment without abandoning ink-painting traditions.

The works of Lui’s students, featured in the second segment, varied widely in form and style. This is not surprising, as Lui strongly believed in innovation and individuality of expression. In the exhibition catalog, in which his former students share their reminiscences about Lui, artist Leung Kui-ting states, “He did not advocate copying teachers; he once said, “Those people that copy me, their artwork will die.” In Kan Tai-keung’s five-panel hanging scroll, *Commemorating My Mentor* (2015), four Chinese characters (which read “ink is supreme”) appear on a white background, written in dynamic forms that resemble trees, rocks and waterfalls. As a tribute to his mentor, Kan accented



the painting with a red dot, a signature motif in Lui’s work. Also displayed here was Wucius Wong’s six-meter-wide landscape *The Highest Good Is Like Water* (2015), which utilizes the traditional Chinese painting style to depict a bird’s-eye view of an abstract, ocean-like scenery, which is otherwise uncommon to the genre. His use of geometric lines and forms, as well as his nuanced tones, create a vivid sense of vitality and movement.

Downstairs was the exhibition’s final section, which showcased emerging Hong Kong artists. The works by this new generation—many were created in response to Lui’s art and specifically for the show—ranged from ink painting and photography to sculpture and video. Inspired by Lui’s devotion to Daoism, Hung Keung offered an interactive installation entitled *Light in the Dust* (2015), which explores notions of reality and the virtual. While viewers looked into a circular mirror and saw their reflection, the latter was projected onto the opposite wall, thereby creating three different versions of the observer’s self. This multi-image effect alluded to a teaching from Laozi’s *Tao Te Ching*, which states that “just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognize the usefulness of what is not.” Floating red dots were also projected on the same wall—again, as an homage to Lui.

Lui played a seminal role, both as practitioner and educator, in shaping a new language of ink painting during his lifetime. As testified by generations of students who studied under Lui, it is not only his art but also his pioneering and generous spirit that continues to inspire artists in Hong Kong today.

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